

Character Class

Back to Basics -- Facing a Blank Character Sheet

by Skip Williams



When you're new to the *D&D* game, the sheer variety of character sheets available, both in print and online, can bring on a headache. Even after you've chosen a character sheet, you face the task of filling it out. The task isn't terribly difficult, but it's hardly intuitive. That's because character sheets are laid out so you can find what you need quickly during play, not so you can create your character quickly. (After all, you'll spend far more time playing your character than you'll spend creating it.) This article takes the character sheet provided here on this site and attempts to unravel its mysteries by creating and recording an example character.

Getting Started

To create a character according to the directions provided here, download and print out all four pages of the character sheet provided at --

<http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/dnd/charactersheets>

or you can download the sheet created for this article's sample character and follow along with the example --

http://www.wizards.com/dnd/files/dnd_cwc_20070109.zip

As you gain experience with the game, you'll probably find a character sheet that suits your tastes better, but this sheet will get the job done. You'll also need a pen or pencil, some scratch paper, four six-sided dice, and a copy of the *Player's Handbook*. At least one pair of four-sided dice also would prove helpful. If you cannot download and print the character sheet from here on the site (or view it on your computer screen for some reason), a photocopy of the character sheet on the last two pages in the *Player's Handbook* will do just as well, though the examples provided in this article don't match that sheet exactly.

Before moving on, you might find it helpful to review the instructions for creating a character on page 6 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Step 1: Generate Ability Scores

You usually can determine your six ability scores by rolling four six-sided dice (once for each score), ignoring the lowest die, and totaling the other three. If two or more of the four dice are tied for the lowest roll, ignore just one of the low dice. Jot down each total on your scratch paper.

Tip: Rolling dice for your ability scores works fine if you're sitting with your Dungeon Master or a group of other players while creating your character. If you're working on your own, however, dice aren't the best method. You might create a character or three while sitting alone for any number of reasons. Perhaps you're trying to quickly create a character for a game online, or perhaps you're working on a small collection of characters that you can bring into any *D&D* campaign. In such cases, it's best if you can prove exactly how you came to get the ability scores you're claiming for your character, and there's no reliable way to do that when nobody else is around to watch your dice rolls. Fortunately, there are a couple of easy methods you can use to get a set of ability scores that are beyond reproach. One is to use the elite array of ability scores found on page 169 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*: 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8.

If you want a little more control over your character's ability scores, you can use the point system on page 169 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Most DMs will readily accept 25-point characters. You might want to give yourself a few more (or a few less) points. In any case, keep a record of how you spent your points; doing so allows you to make adjustments to your ability scores if a DM isn't happy with what you have.

Example: I'll take my own advice and use the elite array for the example character we're creating for this article: 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, 8. This character has two excellent scores (the 15 and 14), two fairly good scores (the 13 and 12), one average score (the 10), and one below average score (the 8). Our example character will be fairly capable, but will have a weakness.

Step 2: Choose a Class and Race

As noted in the *Player's Handbook*, a character class is very much like a profession or vocation. Your choice of class determines what your character can do in the game. A character's race is the character's species. Some races are better suited for some classes than others, so it's best to choose a class and race at the same time.

Tip: Chapters Two and Three in the *Player's Handbook* include a variety of races and classes. Other rulebooks offer additional choices. If you're preparing a character for a campaign you haven't yet joined, it's best to stick with the selection in the *Player's Handbook*, because those classes and races can fit into nearly any campaign.

Tip: When choosing a class and race, be aware that adventuring groups that include several different races and character classes have the most success (because they have the widest array of capabilities). Whenever possible, consult with your DM and your fellow players before choosing a class and race, and try to choose a combination that fits well with your companions.

Example: I'll create a 1st-level gnome druid for this article. This gives me the first bits of information to record on my character sheet: class, level, and race. All of this goes at the top of the first page of my sheet. While I'm at it, I'll jot my name on the sheet. I'll also choose a gender and a name for the character now. It's not necessary to do that this early in the process, but doing it now will make this article easier to understand. I choose a female gnome's name, Roywyn,

from page 17 in the *Player's Handbook* and record that on the character sheet. I'll leave the rest of the sheet alone for the time being (we'll skip around the character sheet quite a bit before we're done).

Step 3: Assign and Adjust Ability Scores

To create an effective character, you must place your ability scores where they'll do your character the most good. The race you've chosen for your character also affects your ability scores, because most races include ability adjustments. You need to keep your racial ability adjustments in mind when assigning your ability scores.

Tip: The description for your class includes information on how ability scores affect members of the class. In general, it's best to assign your highest scores to the abilities you'll use most.

Example: The choice of gnome for our example character's race gives Roywyn a +2 adjustment to Constitution and a –2 adjustment to Strength. The druid class description notes that Wisdom and Dexterity are important to druids. In addition, I hope to make use of the druid's wild empathy class feature, which is based on Charisma.

I assign Roywyn's ability scores as follows:

- Strength: $12 - 2 \text{ (race)} = 10$
- Dexterity: 14
- Constitution: $8 + 2 \text{ (race)} = 10$
- Intelligence: 12
- Wisdom: 15
- Charisma: 13

I record the racially adjusted ability scores on the character sheet. Currently, there's no magic or other effects that change Roywyn's ability scores, so I ignore the blanks to the right of each ability score entry for now. To complete the character sheet, however, I'll need to know the modifier for each of Roywyn's ability scores, so I'll record those now in the boxes to the right of the ability score entries. I can find these modifiers on Table 1-1 in the *Player's Handbook*. I record the following modifiers:

- Strength: +0
- Dexterity: +2
- Constitution: +0
- Intelligence: +1
- Wisdom: +2
- Charisma: +1

Tip: You can quickly calculate the modifier for any ability score using this simple formula: for a score with an even number, subtract 10, then divide by 2 to get the modifier. For a score with an odd number, subtract 11 instead. Here are a few examples: $12 - 10 = 2$, $2 \div 2 = 1$; $13 - 11 = 2$, $2 \div 2 = 1$; $8 - 10 = -2$, $-2 \div 2 = -1$.

Step 4: Record Racial Traits

Now that we know Roywyn's ability scores and ability modifiers, we can determine the benefits her race gives her.

Example: Page 17 in the *Player's Handbook* shows the following traits for gnomes:

- +2 Constitution, –2 Strength. We've already applied these effects when recording ability scores.
- Small: As a Small creature, a gnome gains a +1 size bonus to Armor Class, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, and a +4 size bonus on Hide checks. She uses smaller weapons than humans use, and her lifting and carrying limits are three-quarters of those of a Medium character.

I note these traits in various places on the character sheet. The actual size goes at the top of the sheet. I record the size bonus on attack rolls in parentheses on the base attack line in the Attack Options section. The size bonus to Armor Class goes in the Armor Class section. All this leaves us with several unfinished tasks to take care of in later steps.

The +4 size bonus on Hide checks goes on the line for the Hide skill on the character sheet's fourth page. This, too, we'll finish up in a later step.

The effects of a gnome's smaller weapons must wait until we choose Roywyn's equipment.

To determine Roywyn's lifting and carrying capacity, we must turn to page 162 in the *Player's Handbook*. A Strength score of 10 gives a character the following carrying capacities: light load 33 pounds or less, medium load 34 to 66 pounds, heavy load 67 to 100 pounds. With reductions for her size, Roywyn's carrying capacities are: light 24 lbs. 12 oz. or less; medium 24 lbs. 13 oz. to 49 lbs. 8 oz.; heavy 49 lbs. 9 oz. to 75 lbs. (I've rounded these numbers down to the nearest ounce.) Roywyn's lifting capacities are based on her maximum load of 75 pounds (see page 162, *Player's Handbook*). She can lift 75 pounds overhead and a maximum of 150 pounds off the ground. I jot these numbers in the Carrying Capacity section on the character sheet's second page.

A character's size also affects her grapple modifier. According to page 156 in the *Player's Handbook*, a small character has a –4 grapple modifier, which I record in the grapple section on the first page of the character sheet. We'll finish this in Step 10.

- Gnome base land speed is 20 feet.

This goes on the first page, right below the section on ability scores.

Speed affects a character's jumping ability. Thanks to Roywyn's speed of 20, she has a –6 penalty on Jump checks (page 77 in the *Player's Handbook*). I record this on the line for the Jump skill on the character sheet's fourth page. When we choose Roywyn's equipment, her speed might decrease because of her armor, so we might need to come back and change her speed information.

- Low-Light Vision: A gnome can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination. She retains the ability to distinguish color and detail under these conditions. A note about this ability goes on the character sheet's fourth page.

- Weapon Familiarity: Gnomes may treat gnome hooked hammers as martial weapons rather than exotic weapons.

Druids don't have much use for gnome hooked hammers, so we skip this one.

- +2 racial bonus on saving throws against illusions.

This goes in the conditional modifiers box in the saving throw section on the first page.

- Add +1 to the Difficulty Class for all saving throws against illusion spells cast by gnomes. This adjustment stacks with those from similar effects.

This goes in the conditional modifiers box in the spells section on the third page. We'll finish this in Step 6.

- +1 racial bonus on attack rolls against kobolds and goblinoids.

A note about this ability goes on the character sheet's fourth page. As a reminder, I also jot a note in the attack options section on the first page, which we'll finish in Step 10.

- +4 dodge bonus to Armor Class against monsters of the giant type. Any time a creature loses its Dexterity bonus (if any) to Armor Class, such as when it's caught flat-footed, it loses its dodge bonus, too.

A note about this ability goes on the character sheet's fourth page. As a reminder, I also jot a note in the Armor Class section. The blank for miscellaneous modifiers is handy for that. We'll finish that in Step 10.

- +2 racial bonus on Listen checks.
- +2 racial bonus on Craft (alchemy) checks.

These notes go on the appropriate skill lines on the character sheet's fourth page.

- Automatic Languages: Common and Gnome. Bonus Languages: Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Giant, Goblin, and Orc.

The two automatic languages, Common and Gnome, go on the first two lines in the languages section on the fourth page. Roywyn has a starting Intelligence score of 12 and a +1 Intelligence modifier, so she gains one bonus language (page 12 in the *Player's Handbook*). I choose Giant and record that. Because Roywyn is a druid, she also can choose Sylvan as a bonus language (page 35 in the *Player's Handbook*). We'll stick with Giant, though.

- Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day -- *speak with animals* (burrowing mammal only, duration 1 minute). A gnome with a Charisma score of at least 10 also has the following spell-like abilities: 1/day -- *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, *prestidigitation*. Caster level 1st; save DC 10 + gnome's Cha modifier + spell level.

Thanks to Roywyn's Charisma score of 13, she gains all these abilities, which I record on the character sheet's fourth page. The save DC for Roywyn's spell-like abilities is 11.

- Favored Class: Bard. A multiclass gnome's bard class does not count when determining whether he takes an experience point penalty.

Roywyn doesn't have any bard levels yet, so we skip this one.

In our next installment, we'll cover skill selection, class features, feats, combat numbers, and finishing steps.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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